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‘The little that I have done is already gone and forgotten’:

Farinelli and Burney Write Music History¹

Anne Desler

Public figures’ preoccupation with their reputation is not a recent phenomenon. Myriad eighteenth-century memoirs bear witness to their authors’ desire to write their histories in order to transmit to posterity an image of their own creation. Few twenty-first century historians would take these autobiographies without the proverbial grain of salt despite their authors’ customary protestations as to their veracity. However, other, ostensibly more reliable, sources are not always handled with the care they require. With regard to eighteenth-century musicology, a particularly important and frequently cited body of works of the latter kind are the writings of Charles Burney. His *Present State of Music in France and Italy*, for instance, might appear to be a straightforward travel journal in which the author simply transferred his impressions onto the page.² However, as Roger Lonsdale has demonstrated, its contents are a result of careful selection and arrangement of materials arising from Burney’s agenda in publishing the volume.³ To complicate matters, Burney may not always have fathomed the full extent of the agendas of personages who had no intention of being mere objects

¹I would like to thank Melania Bucciarelli, Margaret Butler and especially Suzanne Aspden for their insightful feedback on this essay.

²Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy: or, The Journal of a Tour through those Countries, undertaken to collect Materials for a General History of Music*, 2nd, corrected edition (London: Printed for Becket, Robson and Robinson, 1773). The first edition was printed for Becket, London 1771. All references in this essay are to the second, corrected edition. Burney referred to the book by the short title, *Italian Tour*. Roger Lonsdale, *Dr. Charles Burney. A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 101.

³Lonsdale, Burney, 97-99.

of description, but desired to be agents in the creation of their image. The focus of my essay will be on one such personage, Carlo Broschi Farinelli, whose example is particularly instructive because of the insight it offers into both Farinelli's strategic manipulation of his reputation and Burney's canny choices in his representation of the singer, revealing potential pitfalls of relying on ostensibly trustworthy 'primary' sources.

When Burney first met Farinelli and Padre Martini in Bologna in 1770, he told them that he 'had long been ambitious of seeing two persons, become so eminent by different abilities in the same area, and that [his] chief business at Bologna was to gratify that ambition'.⁴ Burney, who was on a musical tour through France and Italy to gather material for his *General History of Music*, had good reason to want to meet both men. Farinelli he regarded as one of – if not the most – important performers in music history, and was undoubtedly keen to meet him in person and obtain from him new, unpublished information, which would '[stamp] upon [his] intended History some marks of originality, or at least of novelty'.⁵ As to Martini, Burney knew that he was in the process of writing his *Storia della musica*.⁶ Since only its first volume had been published so far, Burney was both curious about the projected contents of the others and concerned about the positioning

⁴Burney, *Italian Tour*, 204.

⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

⁶The first three volumes of Martini's *Storia della musica* were published by della Volpe in Bologna in 1757, 1770 and 1781, respectively.

of his own work in relation to Martini's, and therefore intended to speak to him before finalising his outline.⁷

Martini, and through him, surely, Farinelli too, were aware of the purpose of Burney's visit ahead of time.⁸ However, whilst Martini encouraged Burney and generously gave him access to his famous library,⁹ Farinelli reacted with dejection: 'Signor Farinelli, pointing to P. Martini, said, "What he is doing will last, but the little that I have done is already gone and forgotten."¹⁰ Burney sought to convince Farinelli to the contrary, pointing out 'that in England there were still many who remembered his performance so well, that they could bear to hear no other singer; that the whole kingdom continued to resound his fame, and I was sure tradition would hand it down to the latest posterity'.¹¹ But when Burney proposed to write his life, or, at least, to insert particulars of it in my history. "Ah", says he, by a modesty rather pushed too far, "if you have a mind to compose a good work, never fill it with accounts of such unworthy beings as I am."¹²

⁷Howard Brofsky, 'Doctor Burney and Padre Martini: Writing a General History of Music', *The Musical Quarterly* 65/3 (July 1979), 315-319.

⁸ Ibid., 314-315

⁹ Ibid., 316 and 319.

¹⁰ Burney, *Italian Tour*, 204.

¹¹ Ibid., 204-205.

¹² Ibid., 223. It was clearly important to Burney to communicate to his English readers the unassuming and decorous character for which Farinelli was widely known on the continent. This is evident from both his own comment on Farinelli's modesty and the fact that he intensified the wording of Farinelli's self-effacing remark, mentioned above, that 'the little that I have done is already gone and forgotten'. In his original travel journal, which is preserved in the British Museum, the passage reads 'mine is past and already forgotten'. Charles Burney, *Music, Men, and*

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Whilst it is possible that Farinelli's refusal to collaborate on his biography was engendered by modesty, or, perhaps, the former courtier's habitual self-deprecation, Farinelli had a greater interest in the propagation of his fame than he seems to have cared to admit to Burney. By professing disinterestedness, Farinelli was promoting the reputation of propriety he had begun to establish more than forty years earlier.

***'It seems to me that until now, I have done myself much honour'*¹³**

The course of Farinelli's illustrious career was known throughout Europe. According to Quantz, it was 'so well known that it [was] not necessary to discuss it in detail',¹⁴ and Arteaga stated that 'no one could possibly be ignorant of it'.¹⁵ However, 250 years later, a brief summary will provide a context for the ensuing discussion. Farinelli's 1722 operatic debut in Rome, in the largest role in *Sofonisba* (Silvani-Predieri), propelled him to instant fame.¹⁶ By 1727, he had an international reputation. His arrival in Venice in 1728 resulted in unprecedented displays of fandom, with hundreds of people following him around the Piazza di

Manners in France and Italy (British Museum Add. MS.35122), ed. H. Edmund Poole (London: Eulenberg, 1974), 91.

¹³ Letter of 8 September 1740. Carlo Broschi Farinelli, *La solitudine amica. Lettere al conte Sicinio Pepoli*, ed. Carlo Vitali (Palermo: Sellerio, 2000), 164. All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

¹⁴ Johann Joachim Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf, von ihm selbst entworfen', *Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (Berlin: J.J. SchützensseligeWittwe, 1754), 234.

¹⁵ Stefano Arteaga, *Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale italiano dalla sua origine fino al presente* (Bologna: Trenti, 1783), 305.

¹⁶ Farinelli starred in the eponymous prima donna role. The size of singers' roles indicated their status in the professional hierarchy.

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San Marco.¹⁷In 1734, Farinelli made a similarly sensational debut in London where he remained for three seasons. In 1737, Farinelli retired from the stage when he was offered the position of ‘Criado Familiar’ (‘personal assistant’¹⁸) to Philip V of Spain because his singing alleviated Philip’s debilitating depression and enabled him to return to his government duties.¹⁹The apparently miraculous power of Farinelli’s voice and its inaccessibility to the public imbued it with a mythical quality and made the singer legendary by the 1740s. Under Philip’s successor, Ferdinand VI, Farinelli was appointed court music director and inducted into the prestigious Order of Calatrava, whose membership was restricted to nobility. Throughout Europe, he was believed to hold great political power at the Spanish court. Shortly after the ascension of Charles III, in 1760, Farinelli had to return to Italy. He spent his retirement in Bologna, continuing his correspondence with his life-long friend, Metastasio, and receiving visits from European aristocrats, royalty, musicians and intellectuals until his death in 1782.²⁰

Farinelli began to strategically shape his public image in the late 1720s. His main aims were to establish his artistic superiority and cultivate the reputation of a gentleman. Although his singing constituted sufficient proof that he surpassed contemporary singers in virtuosity, range, breath control and volume, Farinelli

¹⁷ Letter of 4 December, 1728. Antonio Schinella Conti, *Lettere da Venezia a Madame la Comtesse de Caylus 1727-1729*, ed. Sylvie Mamy (Florence, Olschki, 2003), 226.

¹⁸ Translation of Farinelli’s title by Henry Kamen. Henry Kamen, *Philip V of Spain. The King Who Reigned Twice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 201.

¹⁹ According to Farinelli’s letter of appointment, he was under the immediate command of the Spanish royal couple. Letter of 12 February 1738. Broschi Farinelli, *Lettere*, 145-148.

²⁰ See Thomas McGeary, with the assistance of Carlo Vitali, ‘Farinelli Recovered in Documents: Visitors to His Villa’, *Il Farinelli Ritrovato. Proceedings of the conference at the Centro Studi Farinelli in Bologna on 29 May 2012*, ed. Luigi Verdi (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2014), 140-187.

made it known that he was continually expanding his technical and stylistic expertise.²¹ In addition, Farinelli promoted his extraordinary agility by imitating birdsong in highly virtuosic arias whose texts make reference to songbirds, most importantly the nightingale.²² However, his virtuosity gave rise to the criticism that he astonished his listeners more than he touched them.²³ Given that the aim of musical tragedy, the *dramma per musica* (or *opera seria*), was to move the audience, this criticism raised questions about the validity of Farinelli's performance at a fundamental level, prompting him to react with dramatic changes. In the second opera of the 1730 Venetian carnival, *Idaspe* (Candi/Lalli-R. Broschi), he began to limit virtuosic singing in his roles to one, or at the most, two arias and introduced a large-scale slow, expressive aria that provided a musical counterweight to his gargantuan main *aria di bravura*. In this manner, he catered to admirers of both virtuosic and expressive singing.²⁴ Farinelli underlined this stylistic change by starting to make strategic allusions to the Orpheus myth in several of his roles, thereby laying claim to the ancient singer's legendary fame and power to move emotions.²⁵

²¹ Anne Desler, '“Il novello Orfeo”. Farinelli: Vocal Profile, Aesthetics, Rhetoric'. Ph.D. diss. (University of Glasgow, 2014), 103-11.

²² The imitation of birdsong had wider aesthetic and scientific implications in the early 18th century. See Desler, 'Farinelli', Chapter 5, '“Der Farinell der Vögel”: Farinelli and the Aesthetics of Virtuosity', 120-152.

²³ On 30 December 1728, for example, Conti wrote 'In the end, he [Farinelli] surprises more than he touches', and that Faustina (whose singing had constituted the yardstick of virtuosity in Venice prior to Farinelli's arrival) touched him more. Conti, *Lettere*, 230.

²⁴ Desler, 'Farinelli', Chapter 8, especially 240-41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 240 and 266-68. The first instance of such an allusion is 'Ombra fedele anch'io' (*Idaspe*, 1730).

Farinelli continued to promote his artistic reputation after his retirement from the stage. Restricting his appearances to private concerts for the Spanish royal family resulted in the impression that ‘in Spain, his performance was thought too exquisite for subjects’.²⁶ In 1753, by which time his virtuosity had come to be widely emulated, Farinelli compiled a unique manuscript as a gift to Empress Maria Theresa, in which he documented his vocal performance practice, setting himself apart from his imitators.²⁷ The difficulty of the notated cadenzas and ornamentation is such that the Farinelli biographer, Sandro Capelletto, plausibly suggests that the singer ‘evidently [presupposed] that no one at the Viennese court would be able to sing his variations and cadenzas’.²⁸ Farinelli probably expected the handsome volume to be examined by connoisseurs at the court and preserved for posterity in the imperial library. With the manuscript, Farinelli also furthered his reputation as a gentleman and courtier. It makes no reference whatsoever to his stage career; instead, the dedication invokes the empress’s memory of Farinelli’s visit to Vienna and emphasises his long-standing service at the Spanish court.²⁹

²⁶Burney, *A General History of Music From the Earliest to the Present Period* (London: Printed for Burney, 1789), IV: 414-15.

²⁷ Among the numerous contemporary references to the widespread imitation of Farinelli’s style are Metastasio’s letters of 1 August 1750 and of sometime in August 1751, Pietro Metastasio, *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio*, ed. Bruno Brunelli (Milan: Mondadori, 1743-54), Vols. III-V: *Lettere*, III: 555-56 and 664, respectively, and Vincenzo Martinelli’s *Lettere familiari e critiche* (London: Nourse, 1758), 361-62.

²⁸Sandro Cappelletto, *La voce perduta: vita di Farinelli, evirato cantore* (Turin: EDT, 1995), 94.

²⁹Carlo Broschi Farinelli, *Collection of Six Arias*, A-WnMus.Hs. 19111, dedication.

Unlike most castrati, who came from the lower or middle classes, Farinelli descended from a family of possibly noble government officials and had the Duke of Andria as a godfather.³⁰ Nevertheless, he had to employ a wide range of means in order to achieve his objective of acquiring the reputation of a gentleman, due to the disrepute of the stage performer's profession. A highly effective tool was Farinelli's purposeful use of visual representations, which has been analysed by Berta Joncus. A 1735 portrait by Amigoni,³¹ for example, 'apotheosised the singer in a manner generally reserved for aristocratic portraiture' and pitched him as a modern Orpheus.³² In addition to being publically exhibited in London alongside a portrait of Queen Caroline of England, the painting was engraved to enable the dissemination of Farinelli's "'official" public image' by means of mass-produced prints.³³ The paintings of Farinelli from his Spanish period portray its subject in a similar manner.³⁴

On stage, Farinelli established a dramatic profile that communicated the moral values with which he wished to be associated, at the level of both roles and aria

³⁰ Patrick Barbier, *Farinelli. Der Kastrat der Könige* (Düsseldorf: ECON, 1995), 21-22 and Cappelletto, *Voce perduta*, 3.

³¹ Jacopo Amigoni, *Portrait of Carlo Broschi detto Farinello*, oil on canvas, 1735, Museum of National Arts of Romania, Bucharest.

³² Berta Joncus, 'One God, so many Farinellis: Mythologising the Star Castrato', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28/3 (2005), 451-53.

³³ Joncus, 'Mythologising the Star Castrato', 453. According to the 'Domestic News' section of the *Grub-street Journal* 289 (10 July 1735), there was 'a great concourse of persons of distinction every day to see it, at his [Amigoni's] house in Great Marlborough-street'. See also Leslie Griffin Hennessey, 'Friends serving itinerant muses: Jacopo Amigoni and Farinelli in Europe', *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Shearer West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 34-35.

³⁴ Joncus, 'Mythologising the Star Castrato', 460, 485-86.

texts. Already early in his career, he showed a marked preference for the roles of *galant*, respectful suitors and loyal friends. Starting in the late 1720s, Farinelli increasingly often portrayed tragic protagonists who conduct themselves with uncompromising virtue in situations in which they are innocently accused of a crime meriting capital punishment. The two roles Farinelli sang more often than any others, Arbace in *Artaserse* and Epitide in *Merope*, both exemplify this character type.³⁵ Farinelli's aria texts convey the moral integrity of his characters, who react to insult and injustice by pleading or expressing torment, sorrow or despair rather than by expressing anger, disdain, reproachfulness or vengefulness; aggressive sentiments are conspicuous by their absence. Farinelli often performed roles previously taken by other singers (as was standard in the period), but his characters were always created or adapted to his dramatic preferences by means of cuts and changes in the recitatives and the substitution or alteration of between half and all pre-existing aria texts, sometimes possibly by Farinelli himself.³⁶ For example, Farinelli, Nicolini, Senesino and Carestini all sang the roles of Siroe and Ezio in different settings of Metastasio's eponymous libretti.³⁷ However, the sentiments of defiance, veiled threats, pride and offense, which occur in the original aria texts and are retained by the other singers, are significantly toned down or eliminated altogether in Farinelli's aria texts. Libretto

³⁵Farinelli sang Arbace in Venice and Lucca (1730), Ferrara (1731) and London (1734-35) and Epitide in Turin (1732), Lucca (1733), Venice (1734) and London (1737).

³⁶Desler, 'Farinelli', 252-59. These changes were independent of institutional practice such as discussed by Margaret Butler with regard to the Teatro Regio in Turin in 'From Guadagni's Suitcase: A *Primo Uomo*'s Signature Aria and its Transformation', in this journal issue, below.

³⁷Nicolini created both Siroe and Ezio, in 1726 and 1728, respectively, and appeared in the former role three more times. Senesino, Carestini and Farinelli all sang Siroe in two settings and Ezio in one setting each.

alterations also served to reduce the emphasis on military heroism in Farinelli's renditions of roles in comparison with those of other singers (in terms of both the content of aria texts and [presence of](#) on-stage battles), shifting the focus of his roles towards values such as faithfulness in love, loyalty, fortitude and forgiveness instead.

Whilst libretto alterations conformed to the conventions of the eighteenth-century opera industry, Farinelli departed from convention in terms of his idiosyncratic manner of delivering arias, possibly in order to differentiate himself from other leading singers in visual terms.³⁸ Instead of acting throughout or at least striking different poses according to the arias' affects, he appears to have struck an 'all-purpose' pose for his arias, resting his left hand on his hip and his right hand on his breast. This was unusual and consequently frequently criticised or satirised.³⁹ So far, the general assumption has been that Farinelli simply had no talent for acting.⁴⁰ However, it is possible that Farinelli eliminated gesture as an expressive parameter in order to focus the audience's attention on his singing and encourage them to perceive him as a singer only, not as an actor,⁴¹ for 'the Public

³⁸For discussions of 18th-century operatic acting practice, see Melania Bucciarelli, *Italian Opera and European Theatre, 1680-1720: Plots, Performers, Dramaturgies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000) and ed. Nicola Gess et al., *Barock-theater heute. Wiederentdeckungen zwischen Wissenschaft und Bühne* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008).

³⁹See, for example, [Roger Pickering], *Reflections Upon Theatrical Expression in Tragedy* (London: Johnston, 1755), 63-64. I will discuss Farinelli's acting practice in more detail in [a future](#) article.

⁴⁰See, for example, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'Construing and Misconstruing Farinelli in London', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28/3 (2005), 372-375.

⁴¹[Melania Bucciarelli discusses Senesino's great reputation as an actor in 'From Rinaldo to Orlando, or Senesino's Path to Madness', Handel, ed. David Vickers \(Farnham: Ashgate, 2010\), 312; first published in D'une scène à l'autre. L'opéra italien en Europe, D. Colas and A. Di Profio \(Brussels: Mardaga, 2009\), 135-155. She attributes an isolated instance in which he was criticised for standing](#)

of all Countries where *Theatres* are established agree in the Opinion, that the Profession of an Actor is low and contemptible'.⁴²As is evident from period treatises and cast lists, the term *attore* (actor) was commonly used to denote performers on both the operatic and the spoken stage. However, one of the most frequently used terms referring to operatic stage performers in their capacity as singers was *virtuoso*, which derives from *virtù* (virtue, ability). Whilst the notion that Farinelli may have wanted to be perceived as a *virtuoso* because of the term's literal meaning might seem pedantic or naive today, eighteenth-century writers remarked upon the discrepancy between the semantics of this

still 'like a statue' to his critic's antipathy towards the singer (Ibid, 318). Contemporary comparisons of Farinelli and Senesino certainly indicate that the two singers' visual impression on their audience differed greatly. In reference to productions in which Farinelli and Senesino appeared together in London in the 1734-35 and 1735-36 seasons, Pickering states that 'At the same Time, on the same Stage, and in the same OPERAS, shone forth in full Excellence of Theatrical Expression, the graceful, the correct, the varied Deportment of SENESINO. FARINELLI had stole the Ears, but SENESINO won the Eyes of the House; that Part of it, I mean, who were not Music-mad. (Pickering, *Reflections*, 64). A few years earlier, Conti wrote that 'at San Grisostomo, they have a concert for a solo voice, and at San Cassano [sic], they have an opera', contrasting two Venetian carnival productions of 1729, *Catone in Utica* (Metastasio-Leo) at the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo with Farinelli as *primo uomo* and *Gianguir* (Zeno-Giacomelli) at the Teatro San Cassiano with Senesino as *primo uomo*. In the same letter, Conti comments that 'people agree that he [Farinelli] is not an actor and that his strong suit consists entirely in singing arias of a kind that have never been heard before'. Letter of 30 December 1728. Conti, *Lettere*, 229-30. As Melania Bucciarelli has pointed out, Senesino, too, was at one point criticised for standing still like a statue. (Bucciarelli, 'From Rinaldo to Orlando, or Senesino's Path to Madness', *Handel*, ed. David Vickers [Farnham: Ashgate, 2010], first published in *D'une scène à l'autre. L'opéra italien en Europe*, D. Colas and A. Di Profio [Brussels: Mardaga, 2009], 135-155.) Nevertheless, contemporary comparisons of Farinelli and Senesino indicate that the two singers' visual impression on their audience differed greatly. In reference to productions in which Farinelli and Senesino appeared together in London in the 1734-35 and 1735-36 seasons, Pickering states that 'At the same Time, on the same Stage, and in the same OPERAS, shone forth in full Excellence of Theatrical Expression, the graceful, the correct, the varied Deportment of SENESINO. FARINELLI had stole the Ears, but SENESINO won the Eyes of the House; that Part of it, I mean, who were not Music-mad. (Pickering, *Reflections*, 64). A few years earlier, Conti wrote that 'at San Grisostomo, they have a concert for a solo voice, and at San Cassano [sic], they have an opera', contrasting two Venetian carnival productions of 1729, *Catone in Utica* (Metastasio-Leo) at the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo with Farinelli as *primo uomo* and *Gianguir* (Zeno-Giacomelli) at the Teatro San Cassiano with Senesino as *primo uomo*. In the same letter, Conti comments that 'people agree that he [Farinelli] is not an actor and that his strong suit consists entirely in singing arias of a kind that have never been heard before'. Letter of 30 December 1728. Conti, *Lettere*, 229-30.

⁴²Pickering, *Reflections*, 1.

term and stage performers' reputations. Martello, for example, opined that an opera librettist merits the title of a poet 'as little as castrati and female singers merit that of *virtuosi*'.⁴³

Moreover, given that Farinelli 'was a cunning negotiator of the image industry',⁴⁴ he was probably aware that the visual impression a performer made on the stage impacted on the audience's perception of both his on- and off-stage persona. Cultivating a distinct persona was crucial to the success of eighteenth-century star singers,⁴⁵ so he may have wanted to differentiate himself from other leading castrati, such as Nicolini, Senesino and Carestini, who were excellent actors.⁴⁶ Farinelli certainly set himself apart by eschewing stereotypical star behaviour. No instances are recorded in which he refused to collaborate with other singers or demanded their engagement; there were no late arrivals at rehearsals or disagreements with composers. Nor did he engage in open competition with colleagues, aside from possibly once, early in his career, with Bernacchi.⁴⁷ Instead he collaborated peaceably even with singers who were notoriously difficult and competitive.⁴⁸

⁴³Pierjacopo Martello, *Della tragedia antica e moderna* (Bologna: Lelio della Volpe, 1735), 129.

⁴⁴Joncus, 'Mythologising the Star Castrato', 486.

⁴⁵Berta Joncus, 'Producing Stars in *Dramma per musica*', *Music As Social and Cultural Practice. Essays in Honour of Reinhard Strohm*, ed. Berta Joncus and Melania Bucciarelli (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 279.

⁴⁶See Quantz, 'Lebenslauf', 231, 213 and 235 respectively.

⁴⁷Desler, 'Farinelli', 42, 103-107 and 139-42. However, Farinelli and Bernacchi soon became friends.

⁴⁸Anne Desler, 'Orpheus and Jupiter in the Limelight: Farinelli and Caffarelli Share the Stage', *Studies in Musical Theatre* 4/1 (1 August 2010), 27-44.

A strong indication [of](#) Farinelli's desire to distance himself from his profession is given by the singer in a letter of 1738: despite his success, he could 'not stand the draining productions, theatre environment and behaviour of the crowd'.⁴⁹

Farinelli evidently so disliked the stage that he wanted to quit it as soon as this was financially feasible. The first written evidence of this intention dates to a few weeks after his sensational London debut.⁵⁰ However, his extremely busy schedule [from](#) the late 1720s [on](#),⁵¹ purchase of land in Bologna in 1732, frugal spending habits and strategic saving (which are documented in [his](#) letters to Count Sicinio Pepoli, who managed his savings), [all](#) suggest that he had arrived at this resolution [much](#) earlier.⁵²

Whilst many singers gained the patronage of aristocrats and royalty on account of their professional [abilities](#), Farinelli's cultivation of a reputation of gentlemanly respectability and his – by all accounts, excellent – social skills and amiable character enabled him to win and maintain their respect and personal friendship. His close association with noblemen such as Count Sicinio Pepoli and the Duke of Leeds, influential politicians such as the Marqués de la Ensenada as well as the Spanish royal family was crucial [to](#) him attaining the reputation of a gentleman

⁴⁹Letter of 16 February 1738. Broschi Farinelli, *Lettere*, 143.

⁵⁰Letters of 30 November 1734, 8 and 23 May 1735 and 2 July 1735. *Ibid.*, 132-139.

⁵¹In Italy, famous singers performed approximately four roles per year on average in the 1720s and 1730s; starting in 1728, Farinelli sang in five or six productions in most years, although he frequently told Pepoli that he felt very tired. See e.g., Farinelli's letter of 28 July 1731. *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵²Desler, *Farinelli*, 48-49.

himself.⁵³ Farinelli's social success was not fortuitous, but the result of the singer's self-discipline and careful regulation of his personal conduct. His letters to Pepoli attest to his continual concern with his reputation and the pains he took to avoid giving rise to gossip.⁵⁴

***'Signor Farinelli talked over old times very freely'*⁵⁵**

Evidence for his concern for his reputation is provided by Farinelli's [probably](#) intentional misidentification of the female singer seated next to him in a group painting by Amigoni of c.1750-1752,⁵⁶ when he showed it to Burney, as Faustina Bordoni rather than Teresa Castellini.⁵⁷ Farinelli had engaged the little-known Castellini as *seconda donna* to the Spanish court theatre in 1748, had given her singing lessons and had promoted her to *prima donna* within two seasons. In addition to her appearances in the acclaimed opera productions directed by Farinelli, Castellini also became the most highly remunerated singer in court

⁵³ On Farinelli's friendship with Pepoli, see Carlo Vitali, 'Da "schiavotello" a "fedele amico": lettere (1731-1749) al conte Sicinio Pepoli', *Nuovarivista musicale italiana* 26/1 (1992), 1-36. On his friendships with the Duke of Leeds and other English nobility, see Thomas McGeary, 'Farinelli and the Duke of Leeds: "Tantomio amico e patrono particolare"', *Early Music* 30 (2002), 202-213, and 'Farinelli's Progress to Albion: The Recruitment and Reception of Opera's "Blazing Star"', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28/5 (2005), 339-360.

⁵⁴ For example, a year after his arrival in Spain, Farinelli wrote to Pepoli 'I live in complete isolation in order not to give anyone reason to talk about me.' Letter of 23 August 1738. Broschi Farinelli, *Lettere*, 152.

⁵⁵ Burney, *Italian Tour*, 212.

⁵⁶ Jacopo Amigoni, *The Singer Farinelli and His Friends*, c.1750-52, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. It was one of numerous paintings Farinelli had brought with him to Bologna from Spain.

⁵⁷ Burney, *Italian Tour*, 220. [That fact that Farinelli refused to reveal the identity of an English lady depicted in another portrait to Anne Miller, who visited him in 1771, suggests that the misidentification of Castellini was intentional rather than a misunderstanding by Burney. Anne Miller, Letter from Italy, in the Years MDCCLXX and MDCCLXXI, to a Friend Residing in France, 2nd ed., rev. and corr. \(London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1777\), II: 326-328, quoted in McGeary, 'Farinelli Recovered', 173-74.](#)

concerts until her return to Italy in 1756.⁵⁸ Farinelli may have concealed the identity of Castellini from other visitors, too; Count Lamberg's list of sitters accords with Burney's.⁵⁹ Whilst no proof for a romantic relationship between Farinelli and Castellini survives, Metastasio's playful allusions to her in his letters, her inclusion in the group portrait, alongside Metastasio and Amigoni, two of Farinelli's most intimate friends, as well as Farinelli's promotion of her career, attest to his fondness for Castellini.⁶⁰ Owning up to her identity would have invited viewers to make conjectures about the nature of their relationship. However, the presence of Faustina, a singer nearly as well known as Farinelli, in a group painting with himself, Metastasio and Amigoni (i.e., the most famous opera poet and an internationally renowned painter), required no explanation. It prompted the viewer to assume a professional relationship between the two singers and read the painting as a testimony to Farinelli's illustrious career. Faustina was also a particularly suitable choice because of her respectability; by 1770, she and Hasse had been possibly the most famous married musical couple in Europe for 40 years. Farinelli seems to have obscured the truth further in

⁵⁸Patrick Barbier, *Farinelli. Der Kastrat der Könige* (Düsseldorf: ECON, 1995), 160, and Cappelletto, *Voce perduta*, 111.

⁵⁹Maximilian Joseph Count of Lamberg, *Mémorial d'un mondain*, new, corrected and enlarged edition (London [Paris?]: 1776), 141. Lamberg appears to have met Farinelli in c.1773. However, the possibility that Lamberg invented his visit to Farinelli's house, drawing on and fancifully embroidering Burney's account, cannot be excluded. Some of the risqué comments Lamberg attributes to Farinelli do not tally at all with the sense of propriety that emerges from the singer's correspondence and other people's accounts of him.

⁶⁰Barbier and Cappelletto point out the absence of conclusive evidence for a romantic relationship. Barbier, *Farinelli*, 159-160; Cappelletto, *Voce perduta*, 111-114.

conversation with Burney by dating the painting to his early stage career,⁶¹ although he undoubtedly knew full well when and where it had been painted.

With regard to Farinelli's artistic reputation, three anecdotes reported by Burney in the *Italian Tour* are revealing. The first, the story of Farinelli's victory over a trumpet player in a musical battle of endurance, is clearly intended to establish the idea of 'that superiority which he ever maintained over all his contemporaries'.⁶² It does not acknowledge that Farinelli's victory over the trumpeter had been written into the score by Porpora.⁶³ Another anecdote, which Burney included although he 'had often heard and never before credited' [it](#) until Farinelli confirmed it,⁶⁴ furthers the idea of Farinelli's uncommon ability to touch his listeners. In Burney's version of this story, Senesino, who has never heard Farinelli before, as the two singers have been engaged at different theatres in London, is so moved by Farinelli's singing that he forgets his stage character, a tyrant, and runs to embrace Farinelli, who portrays his unfortunate prisoner. Judging by Senesino's and Farinelli's roles, the opera in question is ostensibly the *Artaserse* pasticcio in which Farinelli made his London debut in 1734. However, Senesino had first heard Farinelli in Parma in May 1728, they had sung together at

⁶¹Burney, *Italian Tour*, 220.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 214.

⁶³In the anecdote, the trumpeter stops playing after he runs out of breath at the end of a trill the two performers sustain, a third apart, over a fermata, whereas Farinelli launches into a cascade of rapid runs without retaking his breath. However, in the score, the trumpet part ends with the trill and a rest separates the trill from the ensuing coloratura in the vocal part. The aria in question is 'Non sempre invendicata' from *Adelaide* (Salvi-Porpora), Rome 1723. See Desler, 'Farinelli', 72-74 and 343-347.

⁶⁴Burney, *Italian Tour*, 225.

San Marco in Venice on Christmas Day 1728, and in London Farinelli was engaged by the so-called 'Opera of the Nobility', in whose formation Senesino had played an important role following his [break](#) with Handel.⁶⁵ If Burney reproduced Farinelli's recollections faithfully (and we know he set great store by accuracy), the singer was none too scrupulous regarding historical fact and indeed 'talked over old times very freely', though not in Burney's sense of the phrase.⁶⁶

A third passage in which Burney appears to have quoted Farinelli as closely as his memory and pocketbook permitted is of special interest:

He [Farinelli] told me that at Vienna, where he was three different times, and where he received great honours from the Emperor Charles the VI. an admonition from that prince was of more service to him than all the precepts of his masters, or examples of his competitors for fame: his Imperial Majesty condescended to tell him one day, with great mildness and affability, that in his singing, he neither moved nor stood still like any other mortal; all was supernatural. 'Those gigantic strides, (said he); those never-ending notes and passages (*ces notes qui ne finissent jamais*) only surprise, and it is now time for you to

⁶⁵Desler, 'Farinelli', 44, 50-51, 200-201. On Senesino's role in the formation of the 'Opera of the Nobility', see Thomas McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 158-59. Burney's rightful doubts regarding this anecdote surely arose from his knowledge of the opera scene in London of the 1730s.

⁶⁶In the preface of the first volume of *A General History* (London: Printed for Burney, 1776), Burney points out that 'it is necessary to give authorities for every fact that is asserted' and draws attention to the painstaking process of 'ascertaining the date, or, seeking a short, and, in itself, trivial passage' (I: 12).

please; you are too lavish of the gifts with which nature has endowed you; if you wish to reach the heart, you must take a more plain and simple road.’ These words brought about an entire change in his manner of singing; from this time he mixed the pathetic with the spirited, the simple with the sublime, and, by these means, delighted as well as astonished every hearer.⁶⁷

The comments Farinelli attributed to Charles VI, an excellent musician himself, serve to elevate his singing and career in several ways. First, despite the advice to sing in a plainer style, they express amazement at his virtuosity. The accumulation of hyperboles (unlike ‘any other mortal’, ‘supernatural’, ‘gigantic strides’ and ‘never-ending notes’) sets Farinelli apart from all other contemporary singers and implies that his singing exceeded the boundaries of the humanly possible; it thus supports the narrative of Farinelli’s inimitability. Second, the emperor’s alleged description of Farinelli’s stage deportment glorifies and thereby endorses his idiosyncratically static manner of delivering arias, raising it above the recurring criticism of his acting skills. Third, it attributes the impetus for a change of emphasis from virtuosic to expressive singing in Farinelli’s roles to Charles VI, the highest-ranking monarch in the Western world.

Burney dates Farinelli’s visits to Vienna to 1724, 1728 and 1731.⁶⁸ However, while Farinelli did enjoy unprecedented success at the Viennese court and was treated

⁶⁷Burney, *Italian Tour*, 215-16.

⁶⁸Burney, *General History*, 378-379.

with a great deal of 'mildness and affability' by the imperial family,⁶⁹ it is unlikely that he travelled to Vienna in 1724 and 1728.⁷⁰ In 1724, he could theoretically have crossed the Alps with Porpora, but due to his Italian engagements, Farinelli could only have journeyed to Vienna during the summer months when royalty and aristocracy typically retreated to their country residences; the same is true for 1728.⁷¹ However, no evidence for such visits survives. In fact, it is certain that Farinelli first encountered Charles VI on 29 March 1732; this was more than two years *after* he introduced large-scale expressive arias into his roles in response to criticism from parts of the Venetian audience.⁷² That the 1732 encounter with the emperor was his first is evident from his report to Count Pepoli: 'I found myself shoulder to shoulder with the emperor without knowing who he was, thinking I would be able to distinguish him by his clothes'.⁷³ It is not clear whether Farinelli invented the two additional journeys to the Viennese court or whether Burney misunderstood a reference to Farinelli's engagements in Munich in 1727 and 1728, or drew incorrect conclusions from other data he collected. In any event, by re-inventing the motivation for his stylistic shift of focus from virtuosic towards expressive singing and, possibly, increasing the number of visits to the imperial

⁶⁹Letters of 26 March to 14 June 1732. Broschi Farinelli, *Lettere*, 97-105.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 97-105.

⁷¹ Both Farinelli and Porpora were in Naples in May 1724 for *Semiramide, regina dell'Assiria* (Zanelli-Porpora). In October, Porpora directed his *Damiro e Pitia* in Munich while Farinelli sang in Naples in *Eraclea* (Stampiglia-Vinci). Following his engagement in *Medo* (Frugoni-Vinci) in Parma in May 1728, Farinelli travelled to Munich for *Nicomede* (Lalli-Torri) in October. As is evident from Conti's correspondence, he arrived in Venice before 4 December (Letter of 4 December 1728. Conti, *Lettere*, 226).

⁷²Desler, *Farinelli*, 240-41.

⁷³Letter of 31 March 1732. Broschi Farinelli, *Lettere*, 99.

court from one to three, Farinelli distanced himself from his operatic career and dependence on public opinion, emphasising the importance of his court appearances even prior to his engagement at the Spanish court.

Altogether, Burney's accounts of their conversations indicate that Farinelli spoke little about his stage career, preferring to talk about and show him portraits of 'great personages, chiefly sovereign princes, who [had] been his patrons, among whom [were] two emperors, one empress, three kings of Spain, two princes of Asturias, a king of Sardinia, a prince of Savoy, a king of Naples, a princess of Asturias, two queens of Spain, and Pope Benedict the XIVth'.⁷⁴ Similarly, Farinelli's recollections of his sojourn in England focused on his encounters with royalty and connections with the aristocracy, disconnecting his career from the boisterous environment of the playhouses. It would perhaps be cynical to allege that Farinelli's emphasis on 'great personages' and courts was calculated. It may have been a matter of recalling and sharing those aspects of his career that meant most to him. For, judging by the historical inaccuracy of a dictionary article based on information obtained from his nephew, Matteo Pisani, who lived in his house in Bologna, Farinelli may not have talked much about his operatic career during his retirement at all.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Burney, *Italian Tour*, 222.

⁷⁵Boucous, 'Farinelli', Louis-Gabriel Michaud, ed., *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne, ou Histoire, par ordre alphabétique* (Paris: Michaud, 1815), 14:161-164. Although the article also cites Burney's *General History* and Padre Martini as sources, it states that the 'principal facts were obtained from Farinelli's nephew and heir in 1792' (164).

In contrast, Farinelli's decision not to sing for Burney is very likely to have been strategic, and it was a prudent move – nothing he told Burney served better to perpetuate the legend of his voice. Whilst he seems to have given the impression to Burney that he had 'long since left off singing',⁷⁶ Farinelli reportedly sang for other visitors in the early 1770s, for instance, Count Lamberg and the Electress of Saxony;⁷⁷ as late as 1779, he sang for Elisabetta Rangoni, Princess Gonzaga.⁷⁸ According to Giovenale Sacchi, 'his voice remained strong and beautiful until the end. Until three weeks before his death, he sang almost all day. Comparing himself [in old age] with himself when he was young, he felt that there was a great difference; but other listeners still heard him with pleasure and wonder.'⁷⁹ However, even if Sacchi was not guilty of flattery and Farinelli's voice had withstood the adverse effects of aging unusually well,⁸⁰ his listeners were apparently aware that his vocal style was dated. Lamberg, for example, remarked about Farinelli's singing that 'hearing him sing, one could easily make a very good

⁷⁶ Burney, *Italian Tour*, 211.

⁷⁷ Whilst several aspects of Casanova's report regarding Farinelli do not ring true, his claim that the Electress of Saxony came to Bologna in 1772 to visit Farinelli and, after having heard him sing, exclaimed that she could now die happily, is plausible. Maria Antonia Walpurgis of Bavaria, an eminently talented composer, had studied singing under Porpora and had probably also heard reports about Farinelli from Hasse and Faustina in Dresden. Christine Fischer, *Instrumentierte Visionen weiblicher Macht – Maria Antonia Walpurgis' Werke als Bühnenpolitische Selbstinszenierung* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2007), 52. McGeary, too, considers it likely that Farinelli met the Electress and sang for her. McGeary, 'Farinelli Recovered', 178.

⁷⁸ McGeary, 'Farinelli Recovered', 185.

⁷⁹ Sacchi, *Vita*, 56-57. For his eulogical biography of Farinelli, Sacchi had interviewed Padre Martini and other acquaintances of Farinelli, but also incorporated material from Burney's *Italian Tour*.

⁸⁰ By 1779, the quality of Farinelli's voice had certainly diminished considerably. Elisabetta Rangoni writes of her encounter with the seventy-four-year-old singer, 'I have seen Farinelli, that new Orpheus; he is eighty years old. Age has undoubtedly eased the feeling of regret that his beautiful voice must often have inspired in him. He let us hear its last sighs. Truly, these almost extinguished sounds animent et attendrissent encore. He moved me to tears with the beautiful expression that constitutes the sublime in the arts.' Elisabetta Rangoni, *Lettres de Madame la Princesse de Gonzague sur l'Italie, la France, l'Allemagne et les beaux-arts, nouvelle édition corrigée et augmentée* (Hamburg: P.F. Fauche, 1797), I: 59, quoted after McGeary, 'Farinelli Recovered', 185.

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comparison between music in the old style and in our [modern] style'.⁸¹ As is evident from numerous contemporary writings, including Burney's, even many musical experts had a negative perception of old-fashioned vocal style.⁸²

Burney's report of a performance ~~by~~ Caffarelli, who, though only five years younger than Farinelli, still sang frequently in church and private homes, gives an idea of the impression Farinelli might have made on Burney, had he sung for him.

Many notes in his voice are now thin, but there are still traits in his performance sufficient to convince those who hear him, of his having been an amazing fine singer; he accompanied himself, and sung without any other instrument than the harpsichord; expression and grace, with great neatness in all he attempts, are his characteristics. Though Caffarelli ... [is] rather ancient and in ruin, yet what remains of [him] is but the more precious.⁸³

Whilst Farinelli's voice and technique seem to have been superior to Caffarelli's, the latter had become the leading singer in Italy upon Farinelli's departure for London and some experts purportedly preferred him to Farinelli, including their

⁸¹Lamberg, *Mémorial d'un mondain*, 1: 141.

⁸² Similar comments are frequent in the correspondence of Metastasio, who reports Viennese connoisseurs' criticism of Caffarelli in 1749: 'They say that his taste is poor and old-fashioned, and they claim to recognise in his singing the rancid little turns of Nicolini and Matteuccio'. Letter of 28 May 1749. Metastasio, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Bruno Brunelli (Milan: Mondadori, 1943-54), Volumes 3-5: *Lettere* (1951-54), III: 595.

⁸³Burney, *Italian Tour*, 360-61. See also Burney, *General History*, IV: 420, for a shorter version of the same account. Caffarelli was 60 years old when Burney heard him in 1770.

teacher, Nicolò Porpora.⁸⁴ But even though Burney understood Caffarelli's historical importance and respected him as a 'sire of song',⁸⁵ his mental image of the singer at the height of his powers ~~was seems to have been~~ no match for the reality of his physical decline.⁸⁶ There is no reason to believe that a performance by Farinelli would not have had a similar effect on Burney.

However, Farinelli did perform extensively and 'with great judgment and delicacy' on his favourite keyboard instruments, prompting Burney to comment, 'he sings upon it [his Florentine *pianoforte*] with infinite taste and expression.'⁸⁷ By utilising the imperishable voice of a *pianoforte* instead of his own, Farinelli succeeded in demonstrating those aspects of his art that had not been diminished by age, that is, taste, expression, and musical creativity, without marring Burney's mental image of his legendary voice. Although he never heard it, in *A General History*, Burney describes Farinelli's voice at greater length and in more detail than any other singer's.⁸⁸ Its tantalising inaccessibility seems to have stimulated Burney to reconstruct it by recording every detail he had gathered from people who had heard Farinelli at the height of his powers and in whose memories his

⁸⁴Burney, *General History*, IV: 419, footnote n. However, it is possible that Porpora ranked Caffarelli above Farinelli in order to spite the latter; a letter by Metastasio to Farinelli suggests that the singer and his former teacher were not on entirely amicable terms. Letter of 5 May 1757. Metastasio, *Lettere*, IV: 10-11.

⁸⁵Burney, *Italian Tour*, 354.

⁸⁶It is noteworthy that the epithet 'ancient' bestows a certain prestige and authoritativeness on Caffarelli; ruins, both real and fake, e.g., in the form of garden follies, were in vogue and had romantic connotations. On Burney's and Hawkins's use of 'ancient' see William Weber, 'The Intellectual Origins of Musical Canon in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journals of the American Musicological Society* 47/3 (Autumn 1994), 498.

⁸⁷Burney, *Italian Tour*, 211 and 229, respectively.

⁸⁸Burney, *General History*, IV: 379-80.

voice had not only remained unassailably timeless, but had also been apotheosised by the singer's uncanny, Orpheic effect on Philip V of Spain and his legendary court career.

***'Such merchandise as is capable of adulteration, is seldom genuine after passing through many hands'*⁸⁹**

If Farinelli was mindful of his reputation, Burney was no less interested in self-promotion. The success of *A General History of Music* was a matter of tremendous importance to him. First, he staked a great deal of time, money and intellectual effort on it.⁹⁰ Second, he intended to establish himself as a man of letters by its publication.⁹¹ Raising his status above that of a music teacher and performing musician was probably not only a matter of procuring immediate advantages for himself and his family, but also of leaving a lasting legacy, for, like Farinelli, he was acutely aware that 'practical musicians and performers, however wonderful their powers, are unable, from the transient state of their art, to give permanence to their fame'.⁹² Burney understood the power of print to propagate fame and make or break literary success. Even before the publication of the *Italian Tour* in 1771, Burney had been 'significantly if unofficially involved' with a leading journal, the *Monthly Review*, through one of its main critics, his friend William Bewley, who

⁸⁹ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces* (London: Printed for Becket, Robson and Robinson, 1773), I: iii.

⁹⁰ Lonsdale, *Burney*, Chapter 3, especially 130.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 128-133. Burney had already achieved this aim by means of his *Italian Tour* and *German Tour*.

⁹² Burney, *A General History of Music*, Vol. 2 (London: Printed for Burney, 1782), II: 440.

discussed his articles with Burney in his letters, consulting him especially on matters of music in which he himself was no expert.⁹³ Burney strategically used his connections with both the *Monthly Review* and its rival, the *Critical Review*, to ensure the success of his own publications and discredit rival works, most notably John Hawkins's *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*,⁹⁴ which Bewley demolished in a three-part review in 1777.⁹⁵ Altogether, Burney undoubtedly went about using the information obtained from Farinelli with no less strategy than the singer had shown in imparting it to him. Several factors play into Burney's representation of Farinelli in his *Italian Tour* and later *General History*, particularly: Burney's conception of history; the historical context, that is, the image in England of Italian opera singers in general and Farinelli in particular; and finally, Burney's career aims.

The fact that both in the *Italian Tour* and *A General History*, Burney discusses Farinelli in more detail than any other performer is in keeping with his view of music history and historiographical principles. Burney, who conceived of music history in terms of continuous progress, regarded eighteenth-century opera as its culmination, or 'the *Epopoeia*— the *Opus Magnum* of modern music'.⁹⁶ Farinelli had played an important role in advancing vocal art, 'having arrived at the ultimate

⁹³ Roger Lonsdale, 'Dr. Burney and the *Monthly Review* [Part 1]', *The Review of English Studies, New Series*, 14/56 (November 1963), 346-47.

⁹⁴ Sir John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 5 vols. (London: Printed for Payne and Son, 1776).

⁹⁵ Lonsdale, 'Dr. Burney and the *Monthly Review*', 347. [William Bewley], 'A General History of the Science and Practice of Music. By Sir John Hawkins', *The Monthly Review*. Part 1: No. 56 (February 1777), 137-144; part 2: No. 56 (April 1777), 270-278; Part 3: No. 57 (August 1777), 149-164.

⁹⁶ [Bewley], 'Hawkin's General History', Part 1, 140.

degree of perfection'.⁹⁷ Thus, as 'the performer that comprise[d] the greatest number of ... excellences, and in the most perfect degree,' Farinelli was 'entitled to pre-eminence'.⁹⁸ Furthermore, Burney felt that the length and amount of detail in which a musician was discussed in a historical work should be proportionate to his importance (at least, through Bewley, he criticised Hawkins for failing to apply this principle).⁹⁹

One of the strategies Burney employed to establish Farinelli's pre-eminence was by means of music examples. Those from arias sung by Farinelli amount to eight pages; in comparison, none of the other examples illustrating Italian eighteenth-century opera singers' abilities (that is, 'Divisions in Nicolini's Songs, and in those of his Contemporaries and immediate Successors', Senesino's aria 'Ah traditore' from *Vespasiano* and 'Vocal Divisions and Refinements in Dramatic Music from 1740 to 1755'), exceed 2 pages.¹⁰⁰ Not only the length of the examples, but also their purpose, highlights Farinelli's uniqueness. In Farinelli's case, Burney included the examples to afford the 'musical reader a view of the most difficult divisions of

⁹⁷ Luigi Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les differens théâtres de l'Europe* (Paris: Guerin, 1738), 50. Burney cites Riccoboni with regard to Farinelli's reception in Paris. *General History*, IV: 414.

⁹⁸ Burney, 'Essay on Musical Criticism', *A General History of Music*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for Burney, 1789), III: vii.

⁹⁹ [Bewley], 'Hawkin's General History', Part 3, 153-55.

¹⁰⁰ Burney, *General History*, IV: 271-72, 293-94 and 461-62, respectively. The former are excerpts of arias sung by Gireau, de l'Épine, Boschi and Senesino; the latter contain divisions sung by Carestini, Moscovita, Monticelli, Visconti, Ricciarelli and Mingotti as well as common compositional gestures of Galuppi and Lampugnani, 461-462.

his bravura songs' so they 'will be enabled to judge' his agility.¹⁰¹ In the case of the other singers, Burney used musical examples to demonstrate lack of distinctiveness, choosing excerpts that demonstrated the similarity of the passagework performed by different singers and used by several composers in multiple works. On the coloratura passages performed by Nicolini and other singers in Handel's earlier operas, he comments that 'many of these Divisions occur in Operas of the same period, particularly in HANDEL'S Julius Cæsar, and ATTILIO's Vespasiano. These passages by frequent use became as common as the Aphorisms in Swift's [C]ritical Essay, or the Jokes in his Polite Conversation.'¹⁰² Similarly, he dismisses Senesino's 'Ah traditore' from *Vespasiano*, remarking that

Handel, Bononcini, and Attilio, all give the same divisions in songs of execution, as they did in rapid accompaniments to other songs. As Senesino's *saria d'abilità*, in *Vespasiano*, seems to include all the *roulements*, or rapid passages he was able to execute, I shall, on the next plates, insert it, as an an [sic] exhibition of all the furbellows, flounces, and vocal fopperies of the times.¹⁰³

And the careful contemporaneous musical reader of the 'Vocal Divisions and Refinements in Dramatic Music from 1740 to 1755' might well have noticed that nearly all the techniques employed occurred previously in Farinelli's passagework

¹⁰¹Burney, *Ibid.*, 380-81. Later in the volume, Burney claims that 'such execution as many of Farinelli's songs contain, and which excited such astonishment in 1734, would be hardly thought sufficiently brilliant in 1788 for a third-rate singer at the opera' (413) by way of criticising the influence of fashion and the taste of the amateur audience on musical performance and composition.

¹⁰²Burney, *General History*, IV: 272.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, IV: 291-292.

or imitated it.¹⁰⁴ Of course, the music examples and detailed discussion of specific operas also showed off Burney's musical expertise and the fact that he had been granted access to the royal music manuscript collection.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, as he had suggested to Farinelli in Bologna, Burney inserted a chronological account of [Farinelli's](#) life into *A General History*.¹⁰⁶ Catering to an English readership, the description of Farinelli's sojourn in England is especially detailed, but Burney also dedicates ample space to [his](#) Spanish career and thereby draws attention to its singularity. Burney's highly detailed description of Farinelli's singing covers all its aspects and illustrates two of them with anecdotes, presumably to enable the reader to form a mental image of it and make Burney's points more memorable.¹⁰⁷

In terms of historical context, Burney's portrayal of Farinelli in *A General History* seems systematically to counter critical and satirical representations that had

¹⁰⁴The latter is especially obvious in the excerpt from Perez's *Ezio* for Regina Mingotti. Like Farinelli, Mingotti had studied with Porpora, but the coloratura patterns in question originated with Farinelli, not Porpora, as they first appear in Farinelli's repertory in 1730, when he was not collaborating with his former teacher. Modern scholars, who have approached eighteenth-century repertory predominantly from a composer-centered vantage point have tended to ascribe such similarities to composers rather than singers. However, eighteenth-century readers' awareness of individual star singers' distinct artistic profiles may have facilitated their tracing continuities between singers as well. See Desler, 'Farinelli', 217-19.

¹⁰⁵Lonsdale, Burney, 337.

¹⁰⁶ Burney, *General History*, IV: 378-381 and 414-417. Burney's summary of Farinelli's career contains numerous errors, which are surely unintentional and can be attributed to the difficulty of Burney's task of piecing together the history of his century almost exclusively from primary sources.

¹⁰⁷Burney, *General History*, IV: 379-80.

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been published in the English media since the 1730s.¹⁰⁸ The description of Farinelli's static delivery of arias implies that, unlike other star castrati, Farinelli did not need gesture to enchant and astonish the audience.¹⁰⁹ In fact, Burney paraphrases Bontempi's description of the performance practice of the legendary seventeenth-century castrato, Baldassare Ferri, writing that 'during the time of singing he was as motionless as a statue',¹¹⁰ creating an association between Farinelli and the most famous singer of the previous century. Moreover, Burney blames the dwindling turnout at the end of Farinelli's stay in London on the ignorance of the audience, which was 'blind and deaf to its own interest'.¹¹¹ Burney also mentions Farinelli's contract with the 'Opera of the Nobility' for the 1737-38 season, possibly to answer Hawkins's claim that 'finding at his return to London [from France in 1736] but little encouragement to engage at the opera, [Farinelli] finally quitted England the following summer.'¹¹² Burney even points out Farinelli's respectable ancestry in order to rebut conjectures that he descended from a miller.¹¹³ He also observes that Farinelli 'was remarkably civil and attentive to the English nobility and gentry who visited him in his retreat, and

¹⁰⁸These are too numerous to cite. Most were published in London as castrati rarely ventured beyond the English capital. See Joncus, 'Mythologizing the Star Castrato' (iconography), Cervantes "'Let'em Deck Their Verses With Farinelli's Name'" and McGeary, 'Verse Epistles on Italian Opera Singers, 1724-1736', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 33 (2000), 40-51 (social and cultural context), and McGeary, *Politics*, especially Chapter 6 (politically motivated references).

¹⁰⁹Burney, *General History*, IV: 379.

¹¹⁰Ibid. Giovanni Andrea Bontempi, *Historia musica* (Perugia: Costantini, 1695), 110. Burney criticises Bontempi's work (Burney, *General History*, III: 542), but cites it several times in *A General History*, e.g., with regard to Ferri (IV: 80).

¹¹¹Burney, *General History*, IV: 412.

¹¹²Hawkins, *General History*, V: 327.

¹¹³Burney, *General History*, IV: 379. 'Farina' is Italian for 'flour'.

seemed to remember the protection and favour of individuals, more than the neglect of the public during his last year in London'.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Burney cannot be censured for blind partiality. His comments on Farinelli's contract for 1736-37, descent and politeness towards English visitors are accurate, as is his assessment of the operatic situation in 1737, that is, that the ruin of the rival opera companies was not a result of opposition to Handel but an oversaturation of the entertainment market with Italian opera.¹¹⁵

More generally, Burney answers criticism that arose from a specifically English form of resistance to Italian opera and especially castrati, which was particularly common among intellectuals who considered themselves rationalist and patriotic. It comprised not only resentment against the perceived disproportionate earnings of singers and the aristocracy's improper adulation of performers of a social status far beneath their own, but also the fear that Italian opera resulted in the moral corruption of the listeners as it afforded sensory pleasure rather than appealing to the audience's rational minds.¹¹⁶ Other Italian singers incurred censure and ridicule, too, but Farinelli was subject to especially severe criticism because of his extraordinary virtuosity and the amplitude of his success, as the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 417. Burney may have wanted to contradict an anecdote published in 1788 that represented Farinelli as insolent; the factual errors prove the story to be either entirely fictional or a conflation of biographical details relating to other singers. The story's existence demonstrates that Farinelli, the most famous castrato, came to represent his professional group. See Anonymous, 'Anecdote of Farinelli', *The New Lady's Magazine, or Polite and Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, 3 (1788), 31. The story was reprinted several times in similar English publications in the first half of the nineteenth century.

¹¹⁵ Burney, *General History*, IV: 413-14.

¹¹⁶ See Suzanne Aspden, "'An Infinity of Factions': Opera in Eighteenth-Century Britain and the Undoing of Society", *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9/1 (March 1997): 1-19.

English nobility had lionised him to an unprecedented degree and made his 1735 benefit night an unparalleled financial success. Hawkins, for example, opines that ‘the excessive fondness which the nobility discovered for this person [Farinelli], the caresses they bestowed on, and the presents they made him indicated little less than infatuation; their bounty was prodigality, and their applause adoration’, which ‘was loudly complained of as derogating from the national character’.¹¹⁷

Given his career ambitions, it was in Burney’s interest to confute Hawkins’s criticism because it discredited his rival’s publication. More importantly, it gratified Farinelli’s numerous English patrons and admirers and their descendants, who belonged to a particularly important segment of Burney’s readership – that is, aristocratic connoisseurs.¹¹⁸ Already in his *Italian Tour*, Burney reported anglophile remarks by Farinelli that emphasised his rank and political importance, for instance, that the singer ‘lamented his not being able, for political reasons, to settle in England; for, next to Spain, that he said was the place in the world, where he should have wished to spend the remainder of his days’ and that ‘he speaks of Sir Benjamin Keene with the highest respect and regard, and mentioned his death, not only as a misfortune to the two courts of England and Spain, but as an

¹¹⁷Hawkins, *General History*, V: 321. Hawkins drew on some of the criticism and satire of Farinelli (e.g., Hogarth’s *The Rake’s Progress*) and, in turn, served as a source for later critical commentary.

¹¹⁸ For example, Thomas Osborne, the Fourth Duke of Leeds, died only in 1789. His son, Francis, the Marquis of Carmarthen, who was, like Burney, a member of the Literary Club in London, gave the latter a report of his visit to Farinelli in Bologna on his Grand Tour. Madame d’Arblay [Fanny Burney] ed., *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged From His Own Manuscripts, From Family Papers, and From Personal Recollections, By His Daughter, Madame D’Arblay* (London: Moxon, 1832) III: 271–272. In addition to his friendship with several English noblemen, Farinelli had also regularly performed chamber music with the father of George III, Frederick Prince of Wales, an accomplished violoncellist (Letters of 30 November 1734 and 2 July 1735, Broschi Farinelli, *Lettere*, 134 and 138, respectively).

irreparable loss to himself and all his friends'.¹¹⁹ This also lent prestige to the social success of Burney, whom Farinelli received as an equal and treated with distinction and courtesy. In *A General History*, Burney employed an even more effective means of establishing Farinelli's rank and merit – anecdotes.

The use of anecdotes seems to have caused Burney some intellectual discomfort. Whilst he had the ambition to create a factually reliable history, he wanted to cater to a broad audience and 'have [his] Book so divested of Pedantry & Jargon that every Miss, who plays o' top o' the Spinet should make it her manual'.¹²⁰ Burney points out that 'though the mixing biographical anecdotes in order to engage attention, may by some be condemned, as below the dignity of science, yet I would rather be pronounced trivial than tiresome'.¹²¹ By writing in an engaging manner, Burney wanted to distinguish himself from earlier, 'unskilful writers', who had 'deformed' music history and thus made it inaccessible to the general reader.¹²² Nevertheless, Burney justifies the inclusion of anecdotes about Farinelli, presumably seeking to forestall criticism:

The lovers of anecdotes might, indeed, be gratified with innumerable particulars concerning the effects of [Farinelli's] amazing talents, if anecdotes were not below the dignity of history. One or two,

¹¹⁹Burney, *Italian Tours*, 221 and 223, respectively. Sir Benjamin Keene was the British ambassador in Spain from 1729-39 and 1748-57.

¹²⁰Letter of 28 April 1773 to Thomas Twining (Add. MS.39939, ff. 54-56). Quoted after Lonsdale, *Burney*, 145.

¹²¹Burney, *General History*, I: xviii.

¹²²*Ibid.*

however, that do honour to his heart and natural disposition as well as vocal powers, my graver and more critical readers will, perhaps, excuse.¹²³

He then proceeds to regale his readers with not just one or two, but three specimens; two of these are, moreover, unusually long in comparison with other anecdotes in *A General History*.

The first story exemplifies the power of Farinelli's voice and his implicitly aristocratic disinterestedness. It relates how Farinelli cured the melancholy of Philip V of Spain with his singing and asked for no reward other than for the king to allow himself to be dressed and return to his government duties. Once permanently in Philip's service, Farinelli's judicious comportment earned him universal esteem. In the second anecdote, Farinelli repays evil with good and proves his loyalty to his sovereign and his forbearance. He obtained a promotion for a veteran guardsman, despite having overheard him speak ill of both himself and the king, and only pointed out to the soldier that he had done wrong to accuse the king of neglecting him. The third anecdote illustrates Farinelli's affability and generosity, both of spirit and in financial terms, while recalling the unique quality of his voice and its inaccessibility to the public. He repaid his tailor, who requested an aria in payment for an expensive suit of gala clothes, by not only singing for him at length to the best of his abilities, but also obliging him to

¹²³Ibid., 415. Burney had also already inserted two anecdotes about Farinelli's singing earlier in the volume (380), one about Farinelli's judicious use of his voice in relation to venue size in Venice and another about the instrumentalists' amazement upon hearing him sing at their first orchestral rehearsal in England.

accept double the amount he [was](#) due. By means of these stories, Burney portrays Farinelli as the very antithesis of the stereotypical star singer to whom are attributed the characteristics of insolence, greed and belligerence; Farinelli seems, indeed, even a model of Christian virtues.

What is more, these anecdotes promote the image of Farinelli as a gentleman. The affability and generosity characteristic of a noble-minded aristocrat, or, in eighteenth-century terms, 'condescension' with which Farinelli treats the soldier and the tailor highlight both his good character and his social status. The nobility and personal merit of Farinelli as he emerges from the pages of *A General History* exonerate Farinelli from the reproach of money-mindedness and the English aristocracy from that of not having 'been sufficiently tenacious of their own and the nation's dignity' when cultivating his company, thus gratifying [an important segment of](#) Burney's ~~most 'important'~~ readership.¹²⁴ At the same time, it serves to propagate the image Farinelli had been fostering for decades and [had](#) displayed to Burney.

In the informal, conversational *Italian Tour*, a travel diary, Burney [made](#) a point of giving credence to the anecdotes he included by mentioning that they had been 'chiefly picked up in conversation with [Farinelli] himself and Padre Martini'.¹²⁵ One might expect Burney to have applied no less stringent criteria in his prized

¹²⁴Anonymous, 'Anecdote of Farinelli', *The New Lady's Magazine, or Polite and Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* 3, 31.

¹²⁵Burney, *Italian Tour*, 212-13.

General History, for which, by his own estimation, it was necessary to ascertain the veracity of its contents.¹²⁶ However, Burney seems not to have been quite as scrupulous as he wanted to appear. His claim that the tailor anecdote was ‘frequently told and believed at Madrid, during the first year of Farinelli’s residence in Spain’¹²⁷ invites the reader to surmise that he obtained it from a reliable source, such as a contact in Spain or an acquaintance who had travelled there.¹²⁸ However, Burney copied it – without acknowledgment – from a pre-existing source, very likely the *Dictionnaire des artistes* by Abbé Fontenay. Burney’s version is a close translation of Fontenay’s text and included for precisely the same reason, that is, to prove Farinelli’s nobility of character.¹²⁹ Alternatively, Burney could have lifted the story from the same source as Fontenay, possibly the 1775 February issue of *L’esprit des journaux, françois et étrangers*.¹³⁰ Thus it seems that Burney occasionally employed double standards, especially since he strongly resented unreferenced use of his works by other authors.¹³¹ Perhaps the lack of scholarly rigour in Burney’s use of the tailor

¹²⁶Burney, *General History*, I: 12.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, IV: 416.

¹²⁸ For example, Burney knew Giuseppe Baretti, who gave a favourable account of Farinelli in his well-known *A Journey from London to Genoa, Though England, Portugal, Spain, and France* (London: Printed for T. and L. Davies, 1770), Vol. 3, Pt. 1: 132.

¹²⁹ ‘By the following story, one can judge whether this singer possesses nobility of character.’ Abbé de Fontenai [Louis-Abel de Bonafous de Fontenay], ed., *Dictionnaire des artistes*, 2 vols. (Paris, Vincent, 1776), II: 349.

¹³⁰ *L’esprit des journaux, françois et étrangers* (February 1775), II: 387-88. Fontenay could also have extracted the anecdote from Joseph de la Porte, *Anecdotes dramatiques*, (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1775), III: 514-515 (with a few minor changes). Subsequently, it was also published in [Claude Sixte Sautreau de Mars], *Nouvelle bibliothèque de société* (printed in London, sold in Paris by Delalain, 1782), III: 187-89, and a review of the latter in the *Mercure de France* (7 June 1783), 26-28.

¹³¹ Roger Lonsdale, ‘Dr. Burney and the Monthly Review’ [Part 1], 352-53. Burney may have felt justified in using Fontenay without acknowledgement as, aside from the tailor anecdote,

anecdote is not surprising. After all, Burney had already ~~retold~~~~included~~ the anecdote about Farinelli and Senesino in the *Italian Tour* although he had doubted its authenticity and, possibly, seen through Farinelli's reasons for telling it. However, Burney had probably also understood the usefulness of anecdotes as a tool for promoting his writings.

After initial worries that the reproduction of 'long Extracts' in reviews of his *Italian Tour* might 'too much satisfy the reader to make him inclined to purchase the Work',¹³² the success of the book, which was sold out by 1773,¹³³ probably made him realise the value of published excerpts as advertisement. By including in *A General History* not only mostly self-contained biographical sections on Farinelli (as well as on other famous singers), but meaty anecdotes narrated in an animated style that contrasts with the overall factual tone of *A General History*, Burney provided editors with perfect material for extraction and reproduction in the numerous periodicals that flourished both on the British Isles and on the Continent. That the subject of these anecdotes was Farinelli was surely no coincidence. Burney's introduction to his sections on him in the *Italian Tour* already

Fontenay's biography of Farinelli is an unreferenced, literal translation of excerpts from the *Italian Tour*. As to his sources, Fontenay only remarks that 'We have collected what we will say in his [Farinelli's] regard from different journals.' Farinelli's biography takes up most of the article on Nicolò Porpora ('Il. Porpora', II: 347-50). Rather than translating the passages on Farinelli from Burney's original, Fontenay seems to have copied them verbatim from the *Journal encyclopedique ou universel* 5/3 (1 August 1771; Bouillon: L'Imprimerie du Journal, 1771), 454-465. The latter states that the anecdotes are 'extracted from the work of Mr. Barnley [sic] on the present state of music in France and Italy'. Given the misspelling of Burney's name and the fact that his book had only been published earlier the same year, it is likely that Fontenay was unaware of Burney's authorship.

¹³²Letter to Samuel Crisp, 1771. Quoted after Lonsdale, Burney, 109.

¹³³Lonsdale, Burney, 110.

bears witness to his anticipation of his readers' interest in the internationally famous singer: 'It will give pleasure to every lover of music, especially to those who have been so happy as to have heard him, to learn that Signor Farinelli still lives, and is in good health and spirits.'¹³⁴ In the year of the publication of the *Italian Tour*, the description of Burney's visit to Farinelli was reprinted whole or in part [in](#), for example, *The Critical Review*, *The Monthly Review* and *The Hibernian Magazine*.¹³⁵ And Burney's discussion of Farinelli in *A General History* was extracted for the readers of *The Edinburgh Magazine*, *The Tomahawk!* and *The Monthly Visitor*.¹³⁶ This practice was not limited to England, Scotland and Ireland. In translation, excerpts from Burney's books appeared in several European countries; [for example](#), the above-mentioned French *Journal encyclopedique* and a Dutch reader's digest of recent foreign publications, *Nieuwevaderlandsche letter-oefeningen*, reprinted excerpts on Farinelli from the *Italian Tour*; the Belgian *L'esprit des journaux françois et étrangers* reproduced anecdotes from *A General History*. Burney, who followed the success of his writings very closely – even actively influenced it – could not have failed to notice that the sections on Farinelli were among the most frequently reproduced excerpts.

¹³⁴Burney, *Italian Tour*, 204.

¹³⁵ *The Critical Review* 32 (July 1771); *The Monthly Review* 45 (July to December 1771) and *The Hibernian Magazine*, Or, *Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge* 1 (1771, Dublin: Potts). In the case of the former two, Burney's connections with the journals facilitated reviews of his book. Lonsdale, 'Monthly Review [Part 1]', 347-50.

¹³⁶ *The Edinburgh Magazine* (August 1789); *The Tomahawk! Or Censor General*, issues 54 (17 December 1795), 56 (31 December 1795), 74 (21 January 1796), 78 (26 January 1796) and 79 (27 January 1796); *The Monthly Visitor* 5 (1798).

If the image of Farinelli in *A General History* seemed somewhat idealised to readers who were familiar with less flattering English commentary on the singer, Burney did not need to have qualms about a potential misrepresentation of Farinelli's character and thus falsification of history – Burney's account was based on scores of Continental publications.¹³⁷ The French origin of many of these would have strengthened the notion of the singer's personal merit, as Farinelli had come to be highly esteemed in France despite the traditional French bias against castrati and Italian opera and despite his connections with England and with Austria (both enemies of France in the Austrian War of Succession) during his tenure at the Spanish court. The views of the few continental authors who were critical of Farinelli can mostly be explained by their connections to English opponents of Italian opera singers.¹³⁸ Furthermore, Burney had heard accounts of Farinelli from leading artists of the era, including Faustina, Hasse and Metastasio, whom he greatly respected, and [had](#) drawn his own conclusions from his personal encounters with the singer.¹³⁹

'Longevity is insured by means of books'¹⁴⁰

Both Farinelli's and Burney's strategies proved highly successful. Burney's *Italian Tour* and *General History* remained in currency and became the most influential

¹³⁷Burney, a keen reader of foreign-language publications, was fluent in French and Italian and learnt German before his journey to Germany. Lonsdale, *Burney*, 112.

¹³⁸Examples include Mattheson's and Goudar's comments on Farinelli. Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg: Herold, 1739), 27 (chapter 4, §§ 47-49). Goudar, Sara [Pierre Ange Goudar], *Supplement aux remarques sur la musique, & la danse ou Lettres de M.^r G... a Milord Pembroke* (Venice: Palese, 1773), 88, 92-93.

¹³⁹Burney, *German Tour*, I: 297-324, II: 321-322 and Lonsdale, *Burney*, 114.

¹⁴⁰Burney, *General History*, II: 440.

sources on Farinelli from the late eighteenth century until today, in English and in translation. Burney's and Farinelli's fame was propagated not only through them, but through the myriad periodicals that excerpted them.¹⁴¹ Directed at the general reader, they not only kept both men's reputations alive amongst musical professionals and amateurs, but also spread them beyond their circles. No less importantly, Burney's writings served as a source for some of the most influential encyclopedias of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most notably the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, an expanded and revised edition of Diderot's and d'Alembert's famous *Encyclopédie*, and the *Encyclopædia britannica*.¹⁴² Of particular importance for the reception of Farinelli in musical circles was the use made of Burney's writings in biographical music dictionaries such as Fontenay's above-mentioned *Dictionnaire des artistes* and Fétis's *Biographie universelle des musiciens*.¹⁴³ The latter remained in use throughout the nineteenth century and constituted one of the main sources on Farinelli for musicologists, including the seminal Farinelli scholar, Franz Haböck;¹⁴⁴ it has continued to be cited into the

¹⁴¹*Journal encyclopédique ou universel* 3/5 (1 August 1771); *Nieuwe vaderlandsche letter-oefeningen* 5/2 (1771); *L'esprit des journaux français et étrangers* 49/7 (July 1790).

¹⁴²'Chant', ed. Nicolas-Etienne Framéry and Pierre-Louis Ginguené, *Encyclopédie méthodique; ou par ordre de matières, Musique* Vol. 1 (Paris: Pancoucke, 1791); 'Music', *Encyclopædia britannica: or, A dictionary of arts, sciences, and miscellaneous literature*, 3rd edition, ed. Colin Macfarquhar et al., Vol. 12, Part 2 (Edinburgh: Printed for Bell and Macfarquhar, 1797).

¹⁴³François-Joseph Fétis, 'Broschi (Charles)', *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, reprint of the 2nd edition (1875), (Brussels: Culture and Civilisation, 1963), II: 82-88. Fétis also utilised Sacchi's *Vita* and Giambattista Mancini's account of Farinelli in one of the two editions of *Riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Vienna: Ghelen, 1774, and Milan: Galeazzi, 1777, respectively). The dictionary was first published in Brussels by Leroux in 1835-44 and underwent many editions. Another work with an alphabetical reference component that reproduces Farinelli anecdotes from the *Italian Tour* and *A General History* is Jean-Benjamin de la Borde, *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, (Paris: Pierres, 1780), III: 311-13.

¹⁴⁴Franz Haböck, *Die Gesangkunst der Kastraten. 1. Notenband: Carlo Broschi Farinelli: eine Stimmbiographie in Beispielen* (Vienna: Universal edition, 1923).

twenty-first century. References to Burney's work cemented his reputation in the musical world. His books were also mined, sometimes plagiarised, by authors of travel journals, collections of letters and other informal kinds of publications, which further added to their [diffusion and](#) impact.¹⁴⁵ In this manner, Farinelli continued to be a European celebrity well into the nineteenth century, and Burney came to be acknowledged as a pioneering music historian.

Whilst Farinelli and Burney certainly profited from one another, it would probably do neither of them justice to view their relationship in the light of a common, though probably unspoken, interest alone. Facets of Burney's report of his visit to Bologna indicate that the two men developed a genuine liking for each other during their short acquaintance. Burney's observation of Farinelli, including personal details such as Farinelli's attachment to his [toddler](#) grandniece, Maria Carlotta Pisani, despite her being 'cross, sickly, homely, and unamiable',¹⁴⁶ may have confirmed to him the laudatory accounts of the singer's character that circulated in Europe. Burney surely also felt sincere admiration for Farinelli as an artist. His career, constant self-improvement, perfecting of vocal technique and style, and rise to fame and fortune exemplified on an individual level the Enlightenment ideal of continual progress that formed the basis of Burney's

¹⁴⁵ For example, Brydone's version of the Farinelli-Senesino anecdote recalls Burney's somewhat vaguely, as though from memory. Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta: In a Series of Letters to William Beckford, Esq.* 2nd corrected edition (London: Strahan, 1774), II: 320-321. Burgh's Letter LVII, entitled 'Carlo Broschi, detto Farinelli' consists of chronologically arranged sections from the *Italian Tour* and *A General History*, mostly without attribution. A. Burgh, *Anecdotes of Music, Historical and Biographical, in a Series of Letters from a Gentleman to His Daughter* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Orme and Brown, 1814), III: 85-98.

¹⁴⁶ Burney, *Italian Tour*, 221.

conception of historiography and also marked Burney's own determined career advancement.

There is also the possibility that Burney pursued a similar aim as Roger Pickering. In his *Reflections Upon Theatrical Expression in Tragedy* of 1755, Pickering seeks to rehabilitate the actor's profession and raise its social status, for 'a Master of *Theatrical Expression*, in all its extensive *Significancy*, must be possess'd of such Accomplishments, as to set the *profession* above *all Contempt*'.¹⁴⁷ Pickering's example of an actor of outstanding merit, both professional and personal, is [the famous](#) David Garrick, a friend of Burney and collaborator on several occasions, whom the music historian admired greatly.¹⁴⁸ By the time he published the third and fourth volumes of *A General History* in 1789, Burney, the man of letters, was a member of the elevated circles in which Burney, the music teacher, had been a servant. An expert both in the practice and theory of music, he was well able to assess the relative merits of creative musicians and writers on music and deplored, even as he capitalised on it, the ephemeral nature of [the performer's](#) fame:

To the reputation of a theorist, indeed, longevity is insured by means of books, which become obsolete more slowly than musical compositions. Tradition only whispers, for a short time, the name and abilities of a mere performer, however exquisite the delight which his

¹⁴⁷Pickering, *Reflections*, 8-9.

¹⁴⁸ In his 'Dissertation on the Music of the Ancients', Burney even argues for the invention of a notation for theatrical elocution in order to enable preservation of Garrick's performances. Burney, *General History*, I: 171-73.

talents afforded to those who heard him; whereas, a theory once committed to paper and established, lives, at least in libraries, as long as the language in which it was written.¹⁴⁹

At a time when the modern conception of genius was beginning to take hold and musicians, actors and painters started to be regarded as artists rather than artisans, Burney found in Farinelli an example of a great artist whose reputation he intended to lend longevity by committing it to the pages of his *General History*.

In the preface to his autobiography, Carlo Goldoni raises an important historiographical issue, that is, the reliability of biographies:

It is true that a man's biography should appear after his death; but do portraits that are made after the fact resemble the originals? If it is a friend who takes on the task, eulogies will alter the truth; if it is an enemy, one will find satire instead of [unbiased] criticism.¹⁵⁰

In this sense, Burney's account of Farinelli is a eulogy, a verbal equivalent to Amigoni's portraits of the singer, mediated by the personal agendas of both the singer and the historian. Highly sensitive to the level of civility and manners with which he was received,¹⁵¹ Burney might have given a very different report of Farinelli if the singer had brought out possible residual resentment against 'RostBif'¹⁵² rather than his fine English dinner service for his guest.¹⁵³ Modern-day

¹⁴⁹Burney, *General History*, II: 440-41.

¹⁵⁰Carlo Goldoni, *Mémoires de M. Goldoni, pour servir à l'histoire de sa vie et à celle de son théâtre* (Paris: Duchesne, 1787), 1.

¹⁵¹Lonsdale, *Burney*, 97.

¹⁵²Farinelli referred to the English as 'RostBif' on the occasion of a defeat by the Spanish in the Caribbean in the War of Jenkin's Ear. Letter of 8 August 1741. Broschi Farinelli, *Lettere*, 177.

historians presumably share Burney's desire 'to allay [his] thirst of knowledge at the source' and 'hear with [his] own ears, and to see with his own eyes'¹⁵⁴ – in other words, to gain factually reliable, first-hand information. However, the example of Burney's rendition of Farinelli's self-portrait reminds us of the need to be aware that period sources – even works ostensibly as reliable as Burney's – may offer an image created to a purpose rather than the unmediated 'truth'.

¹⁵³Burney, *Italian Tour*, 221-22.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 7.